

Unit 12: Armenian Religion--Selected Themes

Objectives

At the end of this section, you will

Be aware of the following

- Long-standing history of Armenian/Christian ties
- Theological and judicial independence of the Armenian Apostolic Church
- Splinter branch of the Armenian Apostolic Church, headquartered in Antilyas in Lebanon, refused accommodation with communists in the Soviet regime
- Primarily Muslim background of many of Armenia's Kurdish people

Identify

- Armenian Apostolic Church, Armenian Orthodox Church, Gregorian Church
- Bartholomew and Thaddeus
- Monophysite
- Catholicos
- Echmiadzin
- St. Gregory the Illuminator
- Byzantine Empire

Realize

- Close ties of church and culture within Armenia
- Factions of the Armenian Apostolic Church exist in Armenia
- Armenian claims to be the first state to adopt Christianity as an official religion

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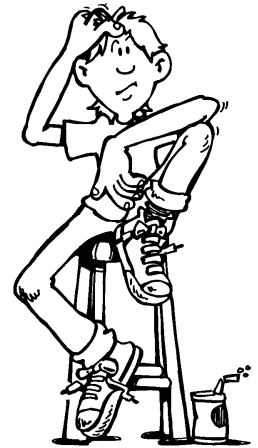
1. Early Religious Roots "Mostly Christians since the early fourth century A.D., the Armenians claim to represent the first state to adopt Christianity as an official religion.



The independent Armenian church considers its founders to have been the apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus and officially calls itself the Armenian Apostolic Church. (It is also referred to as the Armenian Orthodox Church or the Gregorian Church.) The conversion of Armenia by Saint Gregory the Illuminator occurred by about A.D. 314, although the traditional date is A.D. 306.

Armenian Christians then remained under the powerful combined religious and political jurisdiction of the Byzantine Empire (BIZ-ahn-teen, the eastern Roman Empire, @476-1453 A.D.) until the sixth century" (unless otherwise indicated, the following quotes come from the Library of Congress Country Study--Armenia 1995).

2. Monophysite Controversy The Monophysite controversy centered around the exact nature of Jesus Christ. Monophysites (mah-NOF-i-sit) maintain that Christ has one nature, partly divine and partly human. In the 500s, the "Armenian church asserted its independence by breaking with the Byzantine doctrine of Christ's dual (divine and earthly) nature, which had been expressed officially by the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451.



Since the schism, the Armenian Apostolic Church has been in communion only with the monophysite churches of Egypt, Syria, and Ethiopia.

Rather than embrace the monophysite doctrine, however, the Armenian church holds that Christ had both a divine and a human nature, inseparably combined in a complete humanity that was animated by a rational soul. The Armenian church also rejects the juridical authority of the pope and the doctrine of purgatory."

3. Independence "Although the Armenian Apostolic Church often is identified with the Eastern Orthodox churches of Eastern Europe, Russia, and Georgia, the Armenian church has been juridically and theologically independent since the early Middle Ages.



As a national church, it has played a vital role in maintaining Armenian culture, through the preservation and expansion of written traditions and as a cultural focus for Armenians scattered around the world. In the long periods when Armenians did not have a state of their own, their church was both a political and a spiritual leader, and religion was at the center of the Armenian national self-image.

Under the millet system by which the Ottoman Empire ruled subject peoples, the patriarch of Constantinople was recognized as the head of the Armenian community, and the Russian tsarist empire treated the catholicos (highest ranking bishop), the titular head of the Armenian Apostolic Church, as the most important representative of the Armenian people."

4. Church National Identity

Throughout her long history, Armenia maintained a close identity with the Christian Armenian Church.



Zoroastrians from Iran, Seljuk (sel-JOOK) Muslims of Turkey (1063-1072) and Mamluks (MAM-look, Egyptian military rulers), Mongols from central Asia (1242-1400), Russian and Soviet overrule could not remove the fusion of Armenian identity with the Apostolic Church.

5. Leadership

"The Armenian Apostolic Church is headed by Vazgen I, supreme catholicos of all Armenians, who resides in the holy city of Echmiadzin (ech-mee-ah-DZEEN), west of Erevan. The membership of the church is split between a majority that recognizes the supreme catholicos without qualification and a minority that recognizes the catholicos of Cilicia (sah-LIH-shee-ah), whose seat is at Antilyas in Lebanon.

Closely affiliated with the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), the minority branch of the church was hostile to any accommodation with communist regimes while Armenia was under Soviet rule. Both branches of the church have been closely identified with the movement for national independence, however.

A split occurred within the United States membership of the Armenian Apostolic Church in 1933, when ARF sympathizers assassinated the Armenian archbishop of New York. Two factions remained distinct in the United States in the early 1990s.



Two additional patriarchates in Jerusalem and Istanbul lack the status of full catholicates. Three dioceses are located in other former Soviet republics, and twenty bishoprics function in other countries.

Total church membership was estimated at 4 million in 1993. The Armenian Orthodox Academy and one seminary provide religious training."

6. Other Faiths "About 94 percent of the population of Armenia belongs to the Armenian Apostolic Church. Small Roman Catholic and Protestant communities also exist in Armenia. Catholic missionaries began converting Armenians in the Ottoman and Persian empires in the early modern era, and American Protestant missionaries were active in the nineteenth century. The Kurdish population, which totaled 56,000 in 1993, is mostly Muslim but also includes many Christians. Kurds now constitute the largest Muslim group in Armenia because most Azerbaijani Muslim emigrated in the early 1990s. A Russian Orthodox community also exists."



"No regrets."

Vocabulary List: Armenian Religion--Selected Themes

Armenian Apostolic Church Official name of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Armenia. Also known as the Armenian Orthodox or Gregorian Church

Bartholomew and Thaddeus Two apostles whom tradition says were the initial preachers to go to Armenia

Byzantine Empire (BIZ-ahn-teen) The eastern Roman Empire @ 476-1453 A.D.

Catholicos Title of the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church...highest ranking bishop in the Church

Echmiadzin (ech-mee-ah-DZEEN) Located west of Erevan, this is the holy city of Armenian Apostolic practice

Gregory, Saint Also called the Illuminator, this saint is said to be the person who converted the Armenians to Christianity in the early 300s.

Monophysite (mah-NOF-i-sit) Belief which centers around the exact nature of Jesus Christ. Maintains that Christ has one nature, part divine and part human.

Review Quiz: Armenian Religion--Selected Themes



Fill in the Blanks Fill in the blanks with the most correct word immediately following this text. Not all words listed will be used.

The Armenian Apostolic Church claims the (1)_____ Bartholomew and Thaddeus founded their church. Other names for the church include the (2)_____ Church or the Armenian Orthodox Church. The Armenian Apostolic Church remained under the religious jurisdiction of the (3)_____ Empire until the sixth century.

The (4)_____ controversy centered around the exact nature of Jesus Christ. The Armenian Apostolic Church is in official communion with other churches of Egypt, Syria, and (5)_____. The Church (6)_____ the authority of the Pope in Rome.

Though often identified with Eastern Orthodox Churches in Europe, Russia, and Georgia, the Armenian Church has remained (7)_____ of them since the Middle Ages.

The (8)_____ or head of the Armenian Apostolic Church was the most important representative of the Armenian people during the Ottoman empire.

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A small branch of the Armenian Apostolic Church, whose catholicos is located in Antilyas, Lebanon (9)_____ accommodation with the Soviet regime.

About (10)_____ percent of the population in Armenia belongs to the Apostolic Church.

accepted	enlightened	Monophysite
accepts	Ethiopia	patriarch
apostles	Gregorian	refused
Byzantine	Holy Roman	rejects
California	independent	62
catholicos	medieval saints	73
		94



Resources for Further Study: Armenian Religion--Selected Themes

Friedrich, Paul and Norma Diamond. Encyclopedia of World Cultures, Vol. VI, Russia and Eurasia/China. New York: G.K. Hall, 1994. (Article on Armenia, [pp. 27-31]).

Kaiser, Phillip ed. Country Profile of the Republic of Armenia. McLean, Virginia: Science Applications International Corporation, 1997.

Lang, David Marshall. Armenia, Cradle of Civilization. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970.

Library of Congress Country Study--Armenia, 1995.
<[www://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html](http://www.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html)>

New Encyclopedia Britannica Macropaedia, Vol 18. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1975. (p. 1041-1044, Armenia).



"The greatest threat to America today is not Iraq, Iran, North Korea, terrorism or weapons of mass destruction. It is the potential that we will become too complacent during this time of peace."

General Henry Shelton, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff